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THE WHITE HOUSE COLLECTION OF PRESIDENTIAL PORTRAITS

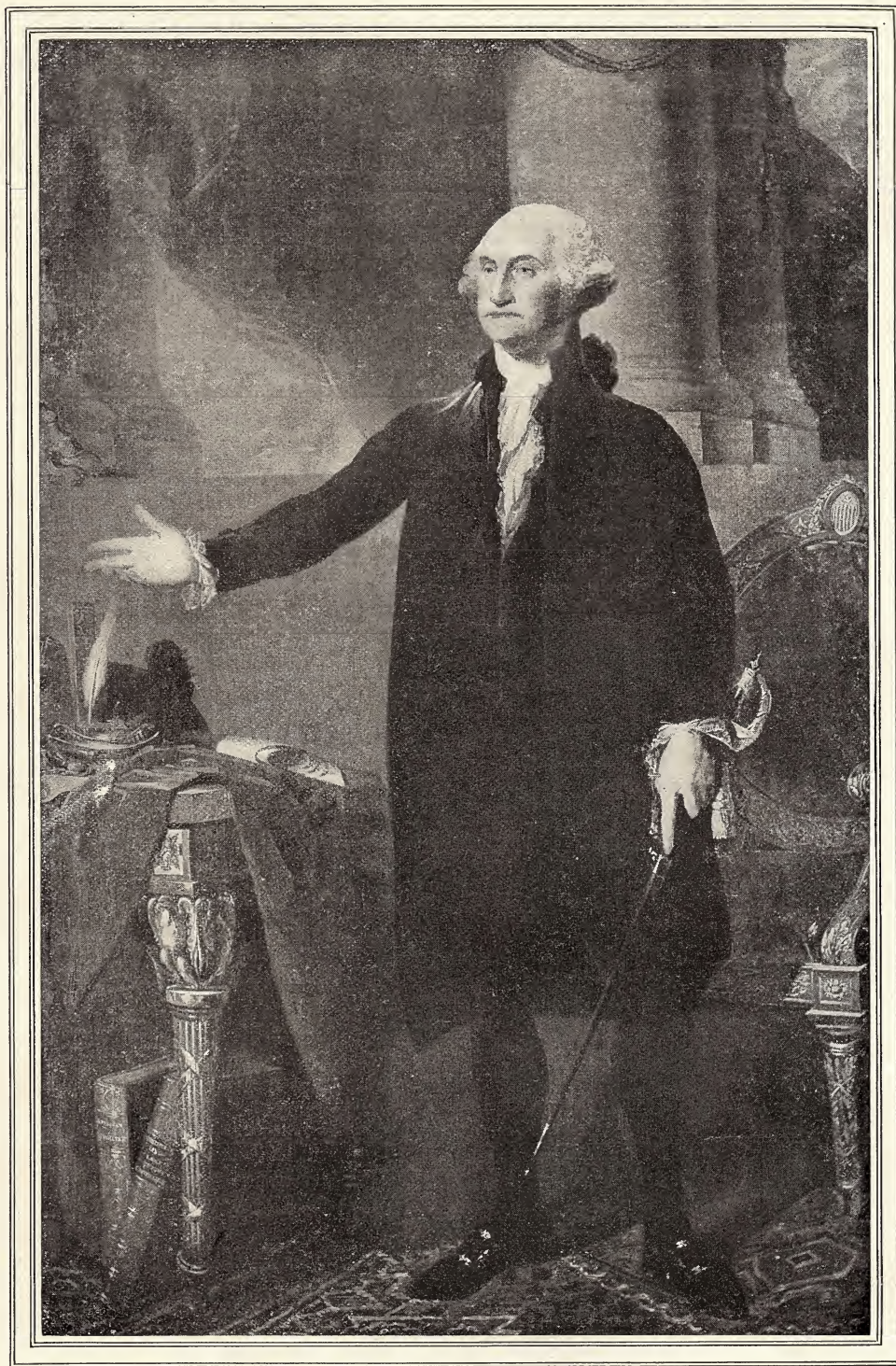
BY HELEN CORINNE HAMBIDGE

THE collection of portraits in the White House is almost unknown to lovers of art. Artists are not allowed to copy from it, and photographers have found it difficult to gain access to the rooms where the most interesting paintings are hung. Moreover, the rooms are not open to the general public, and admission is granted only by card and at stated hours. Hence, one of the most notable art collections in the United States, and one



MRS. JAMES K. POLK, WIFE OF THE ELEVENTH PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES

*From the portrait presented to the White House collection by
the women of Tennessee*



GEORGE WASHINGTON, FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES—THIS IS THE PORTRAIT WHICH MRS. MADISON CUT FROM ITS FRAME WHEN THE BRITISH OCCUPIED WASHINGTON IN 1814

Painted by Gilbert Stuart, and restored in 1866 by H. N. Barlow

that has a very great historical interest, is practically closed except to a favored few.

The paintings which make up the collection are scattered throughout what is called the State Suite, that is to say, the Red, Blue, and Green Rooms, and they are hung without any reference to chronology or natural sequence. Even the famous portraits of Presidents Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln, and of Mrs. Washington, which once were hung on the walls of the spacious East Room—the one part of the White House which is open at all times to the public—were removed to the State Suite at the time when the mansion was remodeled and enlarged during President Roosevelt's first administration. Formerly the East Room was a plain and rather sparsely furnished reception hall, vast in size and somewhat bare, although impressive. It has now been converted into a sort of Marie Antoinette salon, and the paintings just mentioned seemed out of keeping with the general design.

The formal collection of Presidential likenesses began only with the year 1859, or rather, perhaps, with an act of Congress which was passed two years earlier. This act authorized a committee to secure a series of portraits of the Presidents of the United States, to be preserved in the Executive Mansion. It was stipulated that not more than one thousand dollars should be paid for any full-length portrait. The committee was also permitted to purchase any existing portraits of the Presidents from the brush of Gilbert Stuart.

The committee began its work at once, and purchased five portraits, for which, in 1858, Congress appropriated the sum of five thousand dollars. Since that time each successive painting that has been placed in the White House collection, and that was not a gift, has been ordered by special act of Congress.



THOMAS JEFFERSON, THIRD PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

From the portrait by E. F. Andrews in the White House collection

It is a singular fact that of the twenty-two portraits of the Presidents now gathered in the State Suite, quite a number are of unknown authorship. These canvases are not signed; but it is supposed that they are from the brush of

George P. A. Healy, one of the best early American portrait-painters of the French school. Healy was a native of Boston, where he was born in 1808. He studied in Paris under Gros and Couture; and though during the middle



ULYSSES S. GRANT, EIGHTEENTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

From the portrait in the White House collection



MRS. ABRAHAM VAN BUREN (ANGELICA SINGLETON), MISTRESS OF THE WHITE HOUSE DURING THE ADMINISTRATION OF HER FATHER-IN-LAW, MARTIN VAN BUREN—IN THE BACKGROUND IS A BUST OF PRESIDENT VAN BUREN

period of his life he resided and practised his profession in the United States, he spent his later years in Italy and France. He died only fourteen years ago. He was a very industrious artist, and some of his best works are preserved in Faneuil Hall, in the Albany State Library, in the Metropolitan Museum and the Lenox Library in New York, in the Smithsonian Institution, and especially in the Corcoran Gallery at Washington. Although critics find fault with his coloring, his manner is vigorous and his subjects appear to be

full of life, revealing their well-known characteristics.

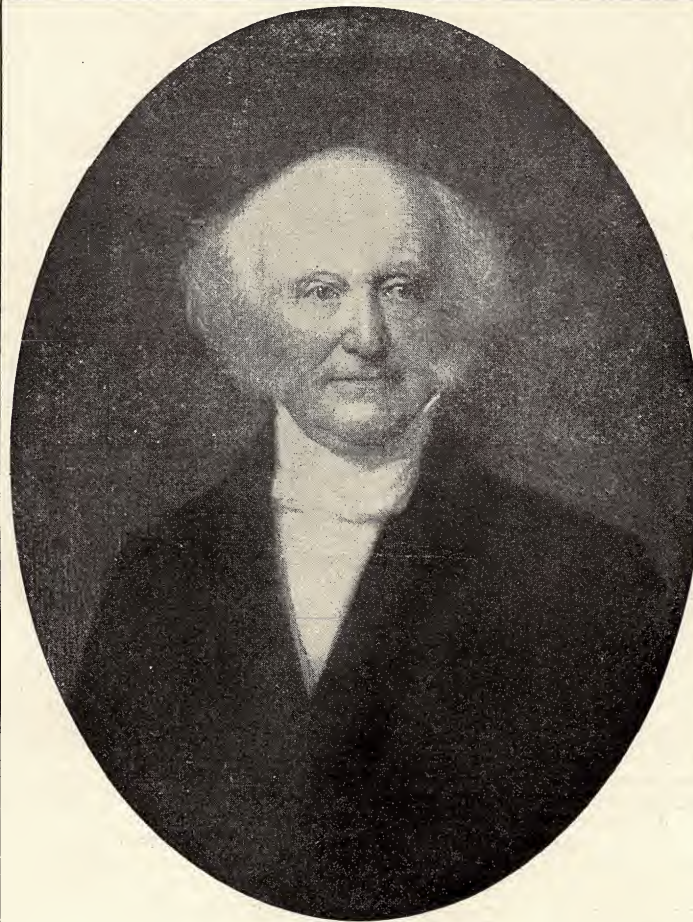
THE PICTURE THAT MRS. MADISON SAVED

The White House contains a historic likeness of Washington by Stuart, this portrait having been procured long before Congress authorized the rest of the collection. It hung in the East Room at the time when the British troops under General Ross dispersed the undisciplined Americans at the battle of Bladensburg, in August of 1814. President Madison was an anxious witness

of the fight; and as soon as the Americans retreated, he hastened back to Washington to secure the public records and make his escape before the invaders could take possession of the capital. Only a few hours remained, and Washington was in a panic; but

trait of Washington from its frame. After the war it was replaced upon the walls of the East Room. It had, however, been somewhat damaged; and long afterward, in 1866, it was restored and retouched by H. N. Barlow.

Washington appears to have been



MARTIN VAN BUREN, EIGHTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

From the portrait by George P. A. Healy in the White House collection

Madison's wife, the plucky little woman who is known to every one as Dolly Madison, kept her head. At the last moment, as her husband, with several members of the Cabinet, was hurrying from the White House, Mrs. Madison seized a carving-knife and cut the por-

trait of Washington from its frame. He once sat to five painters simultaneously—Charles Wilson Peale and four of his sons. This deserves mention as having caused the austere general and statesman to perpetrate one of the infrequent jokes which are recorded as



CHESTER A. ARTHUR, TWENTY-FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES—
THIS IS ONE OF THE BEST OF THE MODERN PRESIDENTIAL
PORTRAITS

From the portrait by Daniel Huntington in the White House collection

coming from him. Wearied by the demands of the artists, Washington wrote to a friend:

Come and rescue me, for I am being Pealed on all sides.

The portrait of President John Adams is a copy made by an artist from an original Stuart in the possession of Mr. Charles Francis Adams. The two portraits of Jefferson were painted by E. F. Andrews, a student of Knaus and Bonnat, and belonging to the Düsseldorf school. Mr. Andrews did these likenesses in 1884, when he was director of the Corcoran School of Art. The painting of John Quincy Adams was from the brush of Healy, who also painted the admirable likeness of Martin Van Buren. This portrait was executed in Van Buren's old age, while he was in his seventy-sixth year. Mr. Healy visited the ex-President's estate, Lindenwald, at Kinderhook, New York, in 1858. It was one of the first paintings ordered under the act of Congress already cited, and is an admirable likeness of the astute Van Buren.

The portrait of the first President Harrison is a copy made in 1879 by E. F. Andrews from a portrait painted in 1840, from life, by J. H. Beard. Beard was a Cincinnati artist, and this portrait is especially interesting as one of his first attempts. He was only twenty-six years of age at the time, and was quite unknown. He died in New York, in 1893, having in his later years turned his attention to animal painting.

The likeness of President Tyler is a genuine Healy, executed at Sherwood Forest in 1859, three years before Tyler's death. That of President Polk has been ascribed to Healy, but it is unsigned. It is known, however, to have been painted in 1858, and must no doubt be a copy, as Mr. Polk at that time had been dead for nine years. President Taylor appears in a replica by Andrews, made from an original by John Vanderlyn, the protégé of Aaron Burr, and a pupil of Gilbert Stuart. Vanderlyn will be remembered as the painter of the huge "Landing of Columbus" in the Rotunda of the Capitol.

President Fillmore's likeness is another genuine Healy, painted at Buf-

falo in 1857. The portrait of Franklin Pierce was done at Chicago in 1858, but it is unsigned, and there is much uncertainty as to the identity of the artist; though it, too, may be a Healy. The unpopularity of President Buchanan caused a long delay in the acquisition of his portrait. Finally, however, a commission was given to Mr. W. M. Chase, who was obliged to rely upon an old engraving, after which he produced the painting which was placed in the White House in 1902.

FROM GRANT TO ROOSEVELT

There are two portraits of President Grant, both of them of unrecorded authorship. They are, however, exceedingly interesting, for the reason that of all the paintings of the general, these are probably the only ones which represent him in the garb of a civilian.

The likeness of President Hayes is from the brush of Daniel Huntington, who was president of the National Academy from 1877 to 1891, and whose portraits of many prominent Americans are well known. The full-length portrait of President Arthur, also by Huntington, is a very good representation of its subject, and was painted during his Presidency. It brought upon the President much good-humored jesting, owing to the fact that at the bottom of the picture—which did not appear in the photograph from which the engraving on page 587 was made—a fallen rosebud lies at his feet. This was thought to be a bit of preciosity on the part of the artist. President Arthur was versed in the niceties of social life. He was a man of the world, and fond of elegant surroundings. During his administration he entertained with more sumptuousness than any other President had done, dipping deeply into his private means to defray the cost of a mode of life which, as he felt, befitted the dignity of his office. The fallen rosebud was, therefore, laughed at by many of his critics, who said it showed him as the devotee of society rather than of statesmanship.

President Garfield's portrait, which is not a satisfactory piece of work, was painted by Andrews in 1889, seven years after the President's death.



GROVER CLEVELAND, TWENTY-SECOND AND TWENTY-FOURTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

From the portrait by Eastman Johnson in the White House collection

Immediately after the close of President Cleveland's first administration, his portrait was painted by Eastman Johnson, who likewise limned President Cleveland's successor, President Harrison. President McKinley was painted by H. D. Murphy, who at one time was

a well-known illustrator of magazines and books, but who studied portrait-painting in Paris from 1892 until 1896, winning a number of prizes at the Académie Julien, and who has since won distinction for his landscapes and marine views as well as for his portraits.

Of President Roosevelt there are three likenesses in the White House, the best known being one by Sargent, which is reproduced as the frontispiece of this magazine. It is not altogether

well, while it is fair, is not in any way remarkable, nor does it do justice to the famous President, who was, it must be admitted, an exceedingly difficult subject for any artist, and who deserved



MRS. THEODORE ROOSEVELT, THE PRESENT MISTRESS OF THE WHITE HOUSE

*From the portrait by Théobald Chartran, presented to the White House collection
by the French Republic*

a satisfactory likeness, but it is a painting conceived and executed in Sargent's most characteristic manner. The other two are by Chartran and Encke.

It is a subject of regret that the White House does not contain an adequate and wholly satisfactory painting of President Lincoln. The one by Cogs-

well, while it is fair, is not in any way remarkable, nor does it do justice to the famous President, who was, it must be admitted, an exceedingly difficult subject for any artist, and who deserved the attention of some great master of portraiture. Only a genius could transfer to canvas those lineaments which seemed at first sight so harsh and so forbidding, yet which were diffused with a wistful pathos and gentleness revealing the beauty of the soul within. No painter has ever quite succeeded in this

task. Of the sculptors who have attempted it, Augustus Saint Gaudens and Gutzon Borglum have been the most successful.

PORTRAITS OF WHITE HOUSE WOMEN

In addition to the portraits of the Presidents, there are quite a number of paintings which preserve the features of ladies who have figured in the annals of the White House. For a long while these canvases were hung on the ground floor of the Executive Mansion, but they were lately placed in an improvised gallery in the basement, now known as the East Corridor, just off the cloak-room. When this change was made, it led to much sharply expressed censure, since the gallery is below stairs, and badly lighted. Here are also some rather inferior busts of famous men.

These feminine portraits were not painted by order of Congress, but were gifts donated by private individuals. Among them is the likeness of Mrs. James K. Polk, which receives a good deal of admiration from visitors, and which deserves attention because of its elaborate costume, representing, as it does, the mode which prevailed in the early forties. Mrs. Polk, who was a very handsome woman, is represented as wearing a gown of crimson velvet and velvet snood with drooping pink feathers, while her neck is encircled by a string of pearls. This picture was given to the White House collection by the women of Tennessee, but there is no record as to the painter.

In the matter of costume, perhaps the most striking likeness is that of "Mrs. Major Van Buren," as she is styled on the tablet underneath the picture. Her husband was President Van Buren's son, and she herself was, before marriage, Miss Angelica Singleton, of South Carolina. She, too, was a beautiful woman; but she is attired in a manner which is in curious contrast to the fashion of the present day. She wears a plumed head-dress that is striking in the extreme. Nevertheless, a close inspection shows that the costume is really very dainty. The dress is of white mull, and the

little lace-trimmed sleeves are caught up with tiny pink rosebuds. Her handkerchief, however, makes one smile because of its size and texture. One might easily take it for a towel or a shawl, and it is very far removed from the filmy cobweb, foamy with lace, which one sees in the little hands of the modern *femme du monde*.

There is also a portrait of the young wife whom President Tyler married just before his retirement from office. She was then only twenty years of age, while the President was fifty-five. They were quietly married in New York, and then repaired to Washington, so that Mrs. Tyler, who had been a Miss Julia Gardiner, was the first bride to enter the White House as its mistress. The artist who painted this portrait was an Italian named Aveli, and the date of the work is about 1864.

In the gallery is a likeness of Mrs. Hayes, painted by Huntington, and presented by the members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. That of the first Mrs. Benjamin Harrison was given by the Daughters of the American Revolution. But the gem in the collection of the women who have presided over the White House is universally acknowledged to be the late Théobald Chartran's portrait of Mrs. Roosevelt, a gift from the French Republic.

There is just one likeness of a woman which has not been consigned to the ill-lighted basement gallery. This is the portrait of Mrs. Washington—who was never mistress of the White House—by Andrews, which has the honor of hanging in the State Suite, on the wall of the Red Room, near the Stuart portrait of her illustrious husband.

One must regret that all these portraits cannot be arranged in their proper order, and so as to display them to the best possible advantage. Whatever may be the artistic merit of some of them, they are of immense interest; and as the years go on this interest increases and makes the whole collection an almost priceless memorial of those men and women whose names are inseparably linked with the history of the republic.

EDITOR'S NOTE—The Sargent portrait of President Roosevelt and the Chartran portrait of Mrs. Roosevelt were engraved from photographs by Frances Benjamin Johnston, of Washington; the other illustrations accompanying this article from photographs by Leet Brothers, of Washington.